Interview with Davis Eugene Boster

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR DAVIS EUGENE BOSTER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: October 20, 1989

Copyright 1998 ADST

Q: How did you first become interested in foreign affairs?

BOSTER: I have often thought about that question, but I am not sure I knew that we had a diplomatic service. During World War II, I was on the staff of Harvard University 's Communications Training Center teaching officers. A Captain Hindmarsh came through recruiting naval officers for Russian and Japanese language training at Boulder, Colorado. This simply struck me as an adventuresome and sensible thing to do. I went to talk to him and told him that I couldn't apply at the moment because I had to go to sea. I had not had any sea duty beyond a couple of months in the Atlantic on an orientation exercise. I said that after I had a year or two of sea-duty, I would like to apply. He said he would be delighted and asked me to get in touch with him when I was ready.

About two years later, the War ended and I came to Washington to find Captain Hindmarsh after having been discharged at Great Lakes. I did find him and asked him whether I could return to the Navy and be assigned to Russian language school. He said that things had changed and that the Navy was no longer recruiting people, but that they were training other officers who needed Russian. I met with someone in the Navy's communications organization, who agreed to take me back into the Navy. They would

send me to Russian study if I applied for a regular commission. They turned me down for regular Navy, which I felt left me to exercise the best option I could find. I applied for a job at the conclusion of the training at the CIA, State and as a civilian at the Navy. All three came through in the same week, at the same rate of pay. One offered Shanghai, one said Washington and the third offered Moscow. I took the latter and that is how I wound up in the Foreign Service.

Q: You went to Moscow first as a political officer in 1947. What was the situation at the Embassy at that time. Bedell Smith was the Ambassador at the time. What was the nature of our relations with the Soviets in the 1947-49 period?

BOSTER: It was a very strange period because in theory we were war-time allies who had just concluded a war successfully. But in fact relations were not as cordial as one might have assumed. Already the coolness was beginning to show itself. During my period there, in the second year, the Russians who were emboldened by the war-time collaboration, had begun to make social contacts with the international community in Moscow. The Russians who had these contacts began to disappear. You would go to a cocktail party and some one would say that Natasha was picked up last night with a rap on the door at midnight. Know one knew were she was until six weeks later you would find out that she was in one prison camp or another. Things were turning cold pretty fast and by 1948 we had the Berlin blockade and airlift. My first year in Moscow was spent translating the Russian press by dictating to a secretary in the morning. There were about five us doing that. We prepared a bulletin that circulated to the Embassy in the afternoon containing translated articles from Pravda or Izvestia. I had no real contacts with the Soviet Government during this period.

In the second year, I was brought into the Embassy to do political reporting. But my rank was too low for any government contacts.

Q: How would a junior officer in an Embassy under these conditions report on what was happening?

BOSTER: We relied mainly on published information that we sent back. We studied the line up in the Politburo ceremonies; we tried to find new nuances in the press coverage —what they covered, what they omitted, what phrases they used. It is not the way one functions in a normal Embassy, but we were reduced to this press analysis by circumstances.

Q: Did you share information with other embassies?

BOSTER: Yes. There was a fair amount of that. Some of them actually had first-hand information. You might get something from the Yugoslav Embassy for example that would not be available to us through our own contacts.

Q: What was the atmosphere in the Embassy under Bedell Smith?

BOSTER: You raise a question of two different styles of Embassy leadership. Bedell Smith was an authoritarian, hard task-master. The discipline was tight and he expected everybody to be super-active in fulfilling their duties. He got that— it was a fine Embassy with good morale, although everybody was conscious that the “old man” was looking over your shoulder and was not going to tolerate any nonsense. He was a very fine Ambassador—good mind and very able.

His place was taken a year after I arrived in Moscow by Alan Kirk, who had been an Admiral and headed our invasion forces at Normandy. He came in with a totally different approach. He felt that his mission was to provide the kind of constructive atmosphere in which everybody could do a good job according to their abilities and he understood that he had a fine staff working at the Embassy which didn't need to be stood over. He was just a

friendly counselor. He also got results because the staff was excellent—a first rate group of people.

Q: What was your impression of the "Soviet specialists" which were a special breed at the time?

BOSTER: Without any question and generally recognized, they were a special breed. The Soviet "club" was the first, later followed by the Japanese, Chinese and other area "clubs". But back in 1947-49 the result of the work of Bob Kelley and others in the State Department in setting up a program which sent Kennan and Bohlen to various Russian places, immersing them in the language and culture of the country before thy went to Moscow. With people like that, the Soviet service had a special stamp on it. I think it dissipated over the years, understandably, but at that time it was very strong with very able people—Fred Reinhardt, Dick Davis, Foy Kohler, George Morgan, etc.

Q: How did the blockade of Berlin impact on you and the Embassy? Did you feel that the possibility of war was becoming more likely?

BOSTER: Walter Stoessel, later Under Secretary of State, and I had gone to Moscow at about the same time, both without our wives—Embassy policy was that wives had to wait one year to join their husbands because of lack of room. Our wives, Mary and Mary Ann, came over on the same ship—the GRIPSHOLM—to Stockholm. Walter and I left the Embassy a few days earlier and went out through Warsaw and Germany and eventually got to Stockholm and came back to Moscow with our wives. Before they left the States, I had run into the Air Attach#. When he learned that we were bringing our wives to Moscow he said he would never do that. He said that we didn't appreciate the importance of what was going on. He thought we may very well be at war in the very near future. He was very negative about bringing the family—I had two little children at the time. Although this was the only conversation I had like that, it was typical of the atmosphere at the time. It was certainly a strain to be in Moscow at the time. After my conversation with the Air Attach#, I

had cabled my wife suggesting that she not come. She had also been expressing anxiety about the transfer. She said that the people in Hudson, Ohio were counseling her against coming. I told her I would resign and return to the States and look for another career. She felt that I was about to give up may career just to ease her concerns; so of course she came.

Q: After the blockade and the airlift started, did the Embassy look for signs of hostility?

BOSTER: I am sure that the Ambassador and the DCM and the military Attach#s undoubtedly would have had indicators in mind in watching the scene, but to say that all of us in the Embassy, particularly at the junior levels, were always on watch, would be to magnify our responsibilities and our daily concerns too much.

Q: Were you aware of horror stories about Stalin or was the Embassy looking for the positive side of the Russian experience?

BOSTER: I don't think there was a better side to look at. But there was no war psychosis in the Embassy. The Air Attach# statement was an exception, although others may have had it in back of their minds as a possible eventuality.

Q: Were you and others trying to turn the United States' perception around? The US after all had gone out of its way to paint the Soviet Union in rosy colors during and right after the War and then in the late 1940s the realities were setting in. Did you have the feeling that the Embassy had to let Washington understand that the situation in 1949 was the real picture?

BOSTER: That was certainly true. We were trying to bring home to the State Department and the general public that circumstances had changed. Kennan's famous article appeared in “Foreign Affairs” at about this time and that was a fundamental part of the re-education of America. We were contributing our part to that perception of the “real world”.

Q: You returned to Washington in 1949. Where were you assigned initially?

BOSTER: The first year I was assigned to the research area, working on Soviet activities in the Far East. I am sure that the whole Department of State was taken by surprise by the invasion of Korea. I remember a message from our Embassy in Seoul written by a Soviet specialist there, who had made a trip around Korea, which noted the absence of any war-like tensions. He did not point out that the North was about to roll. I was therefore absolutely startled by the news when in June 1950 the invasion began.

Q: After that year, what was your next assignment?

BOSTER: An officer—Richard Davis—who had interviewed me when I applied to State and thereafter was instrumental in bringing me into the Foreign Service—in the Staff Corps, by the way—took a personal interest in me. He had returned to Washington from Moscow to be the Director for Soviet Affairs. He decided that it would be useful to have on the Soviet desk, not only Foreign Service officers, but also a Civil Service person who could represent continuity, who would not be reassigned every four years. He called me and asked me whether I would be interested. I said “Yes, of course” and was brought to the Division under his plan. Later, I took advantage of the lateral entry program and joined the Foreign Service as a Reserve Officer because during the McCarthy era, all regular appointments had been held up. So when I was assigned to Bonn, I went as a Reserve Officer.

Q: What effect did the McCarthy area have on the Soviet desk ?

BOSTER: That had a devastating impact. It never affected me personally except for the general atmosphere. there were a number of people that one knew that had come under suspicion for one reason and another. It was a very bad period.

Q: Did it have any effect on the reporting you were seeing? Were people slanting their views to appear tough on the Communists?

BOSTER: This subject was frequently the topic of conversation between officers in the Department, with concern being expressed that it would have that effect. I don't recall any specific instance in which you might have made that comment. It was more in the atmosphere than in specific cases, but I am sure it would have had an effect. It would have taken a bold officer to “cross the line”.

Q: What did you do in Bonn during 1954-58?

BOSTER: The Soviet “club” we mentioned earlier, of which I was by then a member to a certain degree, had begun to maintain positions in certain Embassies. There was one in Paris, in London for a while and there was one in Bonn. That was my assignment which was essentially to cover any aspect of Soviet activity in West Germany and Berlin. This also included coverage of the German Communist party.

Q: How did we look at Germany during your service in Bonn?

BOSTER: There was some concern about Germany in the aftermath of two wars we had with it. I am sure that is a given in anyone's approach to German questions. But when I was there, it was a constructive period and people were optimistic. The Germans were extremely cooperative with us. It was a common enterprise—an optimistic period.

Q: Were you also watching East Germany?

BOSTER: There was another officer in the Embassy, Rebecca Wellington, who covered Berlin. We must have divided East Germany to the extent that East Germany figured in our reporting.

Q: In 1953, there were some riots that looked for a while as potentially dangerous.

BOSTER: That would have been reported in the first instance out of the US Mission in Berlin. We had a special unit in that Mission that covered East Germany.

Q: Did you find a great difference in working with the Soviet group and the West European group?

BOSTER: I don't think that factor was important at all. If you had asked me back then to compare the Embassy in Moscow with that in Bonn, I would have undoubtedly have said that man-to-man, Moscow was better. I might have felt that, here and there, there might have been people in Bonn that would not have measured to the Moscow standards. But I think that would have provincialism on my part. There were some excellent people in Bonn; it was a good group, including Bill Buffum, Jock Dean, Ted Lampson, Arch Blood—al first-rate people.

Q: What were your relationships with the German government?

BOSTER: That is an interesting question. I was still a very young officer, a second secretary. Because I was responsible for Soviet affairs, I had my contacts with office directors who were 20-30 years older than I. Brautigam, who was the Director of Eastern Affairs in the German Foreign Office, was probably in his late 50s and maybe early 60s. The other men were equally senior. Most of the time this might give people problems. It didn't seem to do so in my case. The fact that we had won the war probably had an effect on their attitude toward this sort of thing. I was very well treated; I had easy access to these people; they were very open and frank and helpful. Their views formed a large part of my reporting.

Q: How did you view the German Communist Party?

BOSTER: I really never got much information and always felt somewhat at a loss what to say about it. On one occasion, someone came from Frankfurt to discuss the Communist Party and I racked my brain trying to think of something to tell him. I consulted with

someone else in the Embassy to see whether anyone had anything on the Communist Party. The political game in West German was between the CDU and the SPD.

Q: You returned in 1958 to Washington to be Special Assistant to the Secretary of State. What was that job?

BOSTER: That came about because Jerry Green, who had been in Bonn in the political section, had returned to Washington in the Executive Secretariat as the Deputy. Bill Macomber had been Secretary Dulles' senior assistant. When Bill became Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs, they had to find a successor and picked Jerry Green, who had done a fine job in the Secretariat. Jerry wanted to have someone whom he knew and trusted as his assistant and called me to see whether I'd be interested. I was supposed to return to become desk officer for Czechoslovakia. I was all set—I liked the assignment, we made reservations on the “America” sailing from Bremenhaven. I was called on a Friday afternoon. The family was packed; the car was ready to be driven to Bremenhaven to be put on the ship. We were ready to take a nice break on the trip. The phone call informed me that I was to be the senior assistant to the Secretary's Special Assistant. The job couldn't be held open and I would have to fly back. So I flew back and went to work in Dulles' office for a little over a year. Dulles became ill not too long after I came to work and eventually died of cancer.

Q: What do you recall from working in that office?

BOSTER: Dulles commanded wide respect in the Department; he had a first rate mind; he knew what he wanted and things worked. He had President Eisenhower's confidence. That was back in the days when in our government, the State Department ran American foreign affairs. I have been amazed in recent years when I see the Secretary of Defense and his Department making pronouncements which I would have thought in an earlier day would have prompted a phone call from the President or the Secretary of State suggesting

that he stay out of foreign policy. Dulles was a first rate executive, implementer of foreign policy. You might not always agree with his policy, but you knew what he was doing.

Q: In 1959, you moved back to Soviet Affairs.

BOSTER: Dulles died. I remember that Christian Herter, who was Dulles' successor, sent word to me through one of his assistants to tell me if I wanted to stay on, I would be welcomed. A finer man than Herter has never set foot in the Department. That message was in keeping with his personality and character. But I decided that I didn't want to continue. I was told that this was one time I could write my own ticket—more or less. That is to say that if there were an assignment within reason that I wanted, I would get it. I frankly toyed with the idea of trying to go to Rome, where I always wanted to be assigned. But in the meantime Foy Kohler, who was then Assistant Secretary for European Affairs and who had been in Moscow when I was there, asked me to take a job in Soviet Affairs as officer-in-charge of Soviet Union political affairs. Charlie Stephan was leaving the job and Kohler wanted me to replace him. After stewing about the possibility of asking for Rome or Hungarian language training, I simply accepted what the system suggested that I do and went to Soviet Affairs.

Q: We are now talking about the 1959-61 period. How did you view the internal situation in the USSR?

BOSTER: During that period, Khrushchev came to the United States. I was lucky enough to be included in a lunch for Khrushchev. I remember meeting him then. In general terms, the Soviet Union was still a large black hole as far as our perceptions were concerned. Khrushchev was a rather stimulating, new figure in that black hole. To some degree he was now and then encouraging. There was considerable interest in what he might actually mean for the Soviets. He was not a normal head of the government. His condemnation of Stalin indicated that there might be some hope for new relations. The amazing Gorbachev is more understandable to us after having watched Khrushchev. He has far eclipsed

anything Khrushchev did, but the latter did make some signs of taking a more realistic view of things.

Q: When you were looking at the Khrushchev phenomenon, did you see someone who was shaking up things but who had forces opposed to him who would prefer a less adventuresome domestic and foreign policy?

BOSTER: That is probably right, although we were not that sold on Khrushchev. Our interest was aroused by his direction, although always within the context of a Soviet system which was bad. We did not see at that time anything like the upheaval that the USSR is going through now. It is qualitatively different now. But Khrushchev was an interesting figure and gave us more hope than we had before.I don't think anyone saw a radical change in the Soviet Union. He was not viewed as a Gorbachev.

Q: You went to the Senior Seminar during the 1961-62 period and then on to Mexico City. How did it occur that a Soviet specialist found himself in Latin America?

BOSTER: Everyone in the Senior Seminar had to write a paper. That was one of the major objectives of the course. I decided to write a paper on communism in Latin America. There was some encouragement to do something a little different from one's career. It was a subject that I knew something about—communism— but in a totally new geographic area. Also it gave me an opportunity to travel around Latin America, where I had never been. As a result of that paper, John McKesson, with whom I had served in Bonn and who was in Personnel at the time, asked me whether I would be interested in serving in Mexico City in a position responsible for coverage of the Left there. He may have thought that the Latin American reporting was not as good as it might be and he was trying to strengthen it. I was interested in Mexico City. So plans proceeded for that assignment. Another officer was slated to go to Moscow as Political Counselor; it was decided that he shouldn't go and I remember Herman Pollack, Executive Director of EUR, saying that I should go instead. Dick Davis called me and explained what had happened. This turn of events brought

me to a juncture in my career and I may have made a mistake. I am not unhappy about what happened to me consequently; still, in retrospect, I might have been wiser to go to Moscow. Davis didn't insist and I proceeded to Mexico City.

It turned out that I stayed only for one year, but at any rate I had that one year and polished my Spanish. I enjoyed Mexico City more or less, although it was the least satisfying post of my career.

Q: Why didn't you care for it?

BOSTER: Here is a case where the clear fault lies with me that I didn't make a better go of it in Mexico City. I found it difficult to make the kind of contacts in the Mexican governmental establishment or perhaps society generally that I made in Germany and which I assumed one would make in the Foreign Service. I never really felt that I had close friends in Mexico. Given the history of US-Mexico relations—starting with our possession of some of what used to be Mexico—I can understand why Mexicans might resent the Americans and might not wish to be overly friendly. I don't mean to characterize this in an extreme way, but I think it was a factor. Whatever the reason, I did not have the kind of satisfying experiences in Mexico City that I had elsewhere. I enjoyed it, but it was not the best.

Q: What were our interests in Mexico at the time you were there?

BOSTER: I remember the water problem. It was one of the top items on Ambassador Tom Mann's agenda. We had a very difficult situation created by the salinity of the Colorado waters which reached Mexico. That was a very large problem. Our overall objective was to develop closer relations with Mexico and greater cooperation on world problems. On a day-to-day basis, individual issues dominated the dialogue between the Embassy and the Government. Besides the water issue, we had a nasty case of an American—Dykes Simmons— who had been in jail for a long time who had allegedly killed some young members of a Mexican family on a highway in Mexico. There were allegations that he

wasn't the killer at all; it was another American. This was a hot issue. Congressman Jim Wright of Texas was involved. In fact, Tom Mann took me off my regular work in the Political Section and I spent some time working on the case. I made a trip to one of the hospitals in Texas to interview the, reportedly the, “real” killer. It was a wild episode in my Foreign Service career. I had to act like an FBI agent.

Q: You mention Tom Mann. Can you describe his method of operations?

BOSTER: Tom Mann was a very effective Ambassador, very effective Assistant Secretary of State—hard working, highly intelligent, decent man. He had one idiosyncrasy: he worked best when he felt he was surrounded by people he knew and trusted. This is not an unusual trait but he carried it to a high level. While I was in Mexico, Kennedy was shot. Lyndon Johnson, upon succession, wanted his own man in the State Department —Johnson apparently had some of the same traits that Mann had. Johnson wanted someone he trusted and knew in State and is supposed to have asked Tom Mann, a fellow Texan and a friend, to come to Washington to be that man. He was given the job of Assistant Secretary for Latin American. Tom, in turn, looked around for people he trusted and friends to take to Washington with him. To my absolute astonishment, he called me —as you know, I was not a Latin American expert at all— and asked me to be his special assistant. I was taken back. I was not anxious to do it, but I liked Tom and respected him, and figured that this was something I had to do. So I packed up and came back to Washington. He also asked Bill Pryce, who was in his office in Mexico City. He called two or three other people who had worked closely with him before Mexico. He assembled a crew from various Embassies and they all joined him in ARA. Before we were through, he had more people from our Embassy in Mexico City plus others that I had known. This is the trait that looms the largest in my mind of Tom Mann's method of operation. I am sure it worked for him.

Q: What did you do for Tom Mann both when he was Assistant Secretary ?

BOSTER: For one thing, I was responsible for organizing the flow of telegrams and other documents, screening what he saw. I also participated in the daily scramble—and scramble is the right word—because it was a hectic period. Panama was a real problem. Mann, the Secretary of the Army and a couple of us went to Panama when Americans were fired upon.

I also helped assign responsibility for action on matters of concern to him. I sat in on meetings he had. I met Ellsworth Bunker that way who at that time was our representative to the OAS. He also worked on Panama. I was a general trouble-shooter. Mann had three special assistants—Bill Pryce, Jimmy Johnson and me. As time went by, he tended to rely more and more on Johnson. Johnson knew more about Latin America. As a “non-Latin Americanist”, I had a special role more on the managerial side.

Q: Did you get any feelings for the Latin American experts?

BOSTER: Some were excellent, some did not seem quite as able as other officers I met in other Bureaus. They varied a lot. We had a curious arrangement that Mann developed. AID was prominent in foreign affairs and in the Latin American Bureau we had joint offices —AID and State. In some offices, the Director was an AID official. In other, State officers were in charge. We had the merger of the two bureaucracies back-to-back.

Q: Do you believe that Latin America only comes to the fore when something awful happens?

BOSTER: That viewpoint has been with us for a long period. I am not sure I felt that it was necessarily true. It may have been because in those days, Latin America tended to cause less problems—we were fixated on the Soviet Union as the source of our difficulties. We concentrated on building up NATO and worried about other parts of the world like Vietnam. Latin America took care of itself. It was not a back-water, but didn't require daily attention

from the top levels of our government. But I didn't feel that it was neglected when I was working there.

Q: Did the Dominican Republic crisis occur during your watch?

BOSTER: It did, but way towards the end. By the time it arose, Foy Kohler did a very curious thing. Without saying anything to me although I had seen him socially not long before, he went to see Mann. Mann told me that Kohler, who was then Ambassador to the Soviet Union, was coming to see him. Foy told Tom that he wanted me as his Political Counselor in Moscow and he hoped that Mann would understand—this was all reported to me by Mann after the meeting. Mann put it up to me, but I told him the system should decide. I didn't want to seem disloyal to Mann or Kohler. Mann probably wanted me stay if I had had a consuming desire to stay in Latin American work. I didn't have that; so I was assigned to Moscow.

Q: You served in Moscow as Political Counselor from 1965-67. What was the situation in the USSR at that time?

BOSTER: There had been some relaxation and some contacts permitted between Soviet citizens and the American Embassy. Some of our people were seeing a fair number of Russians—not the general mass, but people in the fields of the arts, literature, etc. That was different from my previous tour. The results of these contacts formed part of our reporting.

Q: What was the content of these reports?

BOSTER: As always, we were reporting a lot based on the Soviet press. By this time, we had more contacts. We had regular meetings with the British, French, Germans and other colleagues. These were institutionalized to review developments and form a consensus on directions, who was up, who was down, what the policy would be on the Far East and so on.

Q: During this period, we were getting deeper and deeper into Vietnam. Was this impacting in relations?

BOSTER: Vietnam did, inevitably. I can remember going with Foy Kohler to see Gromyko. Sometime he would take John Guthrie, the DCM, but more often he took me as note taker. There was no budging; it was just a collision of view points. There were no substantive collaborative exchanges on any subject. Gromyko was personally cordial enough, but these were tough days.

Q: Were we looking for opening wedges to develop better ties?

BOSTER: No, I don't think so. We took what was going on as the inevitable consequence of their philosophy against ours. We were trying to manage the relationship in such a way that it didn't result in World War III. I certainly have no recollection of us trying to find a way to entice them into a friendlier relationship.

Q: You served two of our outstanding Ambassadors: Foy Kohler and Tommy Thompson. Could you compare the two?

BOSTER: I mentioned earlier the difference between Bedell Smith and Alan Kirk. And again, in the case of Kohler and Thompson, we had two excellent men with very different styles. Foy Kohler was a team man. He seldom sent an important telegram to Washington without calling his senior Embassy aides who had competence in the subject matter to the “secure room” for a discussion and more often than not to work on a draft telegram he had prepared. On a number of occasions, Foy would make changes, sometime important changes, in the text as result of the discussion and the views that he heard. If they made sense to him, he would change. Often he would hear the views, but decide that they were not material. But in this sense, he was a team man and in terms of morale of the people working for him, this was wonderful. I felt a productive part of the machine and that I had a role to play that was recognized and appreciated. Llewellyn Thompson who succeeded

Kohler—second time as Ambassador to Moscow—had a reputation of a “star” figure which he deserved. I was very impressed by him. But he was not a team man. In fact, the problem was to insure that you were seeing all the material he was sending. That was a marked difference in approach. He had a profound knowledge of the Soviet system gained over many years. He read the Soviet press thoroughly. I don't think he ever took anybody with him when he went to see the Soviet leaders. I think he had a conception of his role as one of doing whatever he could to develop and sustain a close and trusting relationship with the Soviet leadership so that it would trust him to be a reliable messenger. He probably thought that the success of his mission would depend on the development of that special relationship. It was a one-man relationship.

Q: During the 1965-67 period, were there any major developments in our relations?

BOSTER: One of the developments concerned a young American man who crossed the Soviet border and was put in jail. He was from Minnesota, I think. They put him an jail and were of course trying to get him out. This went on and on and the Soviets were not being forthcoming at all. Eventually, he was transported from one prison to another and he slashed his wrists. The question was whether he really committed suicide. We took the matter very seriously. The Soviets had a fundamental attitude which was demonstrated again and again, not only in this case, but in many others that the Soviet borders were inviolable and nobody comes over those borders without consequences. There were a series of incidents with airplanes being shot down. They were doing reconnaissance work close to the territorial limits. The Soviets wanted to establish the fundamental principle that the Soviet borders could not be tampered with. They would pay a high price for inculcating this principle into their own people. It was just a natural attitude for the Soviet Union in those days. It characterized their whole approach.

Q: The “Rust” affairs of three-four years ago shook up the whole military establishment. Your next assignment was as DCM to Nepal. How did that happen?

BOSTER: My tour in Moscow was going to be up shortly and I was wondering what to do next. I got a letter from Mac Toon—he was the Office director in EUR—about what I wanted to do next. I told him I would like to go to Yugoslavia as DCM. The next thing I knew I got a letter from Carol Laise, whom I had known in the Senior Seminar. She was at this time our Ambassador in Kathmandu. She said that she had just asked for me to be her DCM and she hoped I would accept. Now I had just been promoted to Class-I and the job was a Class III, which was a striking gap. This was the only time in my career in the Foreign Service that I did not want to accept the job that the system had planned for me. It wasn't the job I wanted and furthermore what would I do in Kathmandu with my background? I was not enthusiastic at all, although I liked Carol. I appreciated her wish to have me assigned to her post—that was very flattering. I almost said “No”, but then I finally decided that if the system wanted me to go, I would.

Q: What did you do in Nepal?

BOSTER: It was an interesting place; I loved it. It was a marvelous opportunity to see one of most beautiful and fascinating countries in the world, but professionally I didn't have that much to do. Maybe I didn't do everything I should have. My predecessor had learned the language and became very proficient in it. I took lessons for about three weeks and decided that it was such an esoteric language that I would never use again, so I dropped the lessons. I was not over-worked in that assignment.

Q: Lets' move on to 1970 when you became DCM in Warsaw. You were there until 1974. Who was the Ambassador and how did he operate?

BOSTER: Walter Stoessel was the Ambassador. He was excellent. He again, like Kohler, was a team player—collegiate atmosphere in the Embassy. I have never known anybody who did a better job of instilling a good, cooperative atmosphere in an Embassy. He paid attention to people. He took pains to have people to the residence. He had a paddle tennis court built on the Embassy grounds which gave us an opportunity to get some exercise in

the winter. He organized tournaments with a dinner at the end celebrating the tournament; every one was invited to it and he gave a masterful short speech, tying things together, describing incidents that had occurred during the season. He was just marvelous at that. He established a good atmosphere. He was a first rate Ambassador, supported by an excellent staff.

Q: How did he use you as the Deputy Chief of Mission?

BOSTER: His right hand man for supervising the work of the Political and Economic Sections and Administrative, I guess. Any cable that came up to him would go through me. Sometimes I would send it back, pointing out things that should be changed or new approaches. I would make recommendations to him about a variety of issues. I can't say that he let me run the Embassy and he did the representational work. That would be an exaggeration, but to some degree I was running elements of the Embassy.

Q: What were the major developments that happened in US-Polish relations while you were there?

BOSTER: We opened a commercial office in the Embassy. There was an emergence of scientific cooperation. We had a very active Science Officer who was involved in scientific cooperation programs between the two governments. I don't recall any sensational or world-shaking developments during this period.

Q: How did we view Poland? Was it a different atmosphere from the USSR? Were things changing?

BOSTER: I think there was a little sense that Gierek, who had succeeded Gomulka was more comparable to Khrushchev than to Brezhnev. There was a sense that Gierek might be a little better deal for Poland. For one thing, he was interested in more cooperation with the West, which resulted in a lot of economic credits, which we may have regretted later on because they were in large measure wasted. They resulted in terribly high Polish

debt to the US and the West, which still bedevils them. But I don't think we saw Gierek as a great radical change in the behavior of the Communist Party. Poland is very different from the Soviet Union. The Embassy's attitude was one of sympathy for the Polish people who had to put up with other people trying to run their affairs—the over-lords in Moscow dictating to them.

Q: Were you involved in the one-day visit by President Nixon in May, 1972?

BOSTER: I was the control officer for that visit. I thought the visit was well received. I thought we were a little rough on the Poles on how the program was organized. The visit was after all in their country but too often their views of what should be done was over-ridden by us. But the visit went well enough and was useful.

Q: How did our involvement in Vietnam play in Poland during this period?

BOSTER: It was roundly condemned. The Polish government and press was very much opposed. But the Polish people did not show any resentment. We were and are viewed as a model by the Polish people in many respects. The Poles have a vision of the United States which is even more flattering than we may deserve. They love the US; this a dream country for them. They are so friendly to the US. All the Poles I have met were just wonderful. I have never seen such an atmosphere of adulation for the US.

Q: Your next assignment was as Ambassador to Bangladesh from 1974 to 1976. How did this assignment develop?

BOSTER: The phone rang one day when I was in Warsaw and it was Walter Stoessel. He was at that time Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. He told me that the Department had decided to propose my name to the White House for Ambassador to Bangladesh. He wanted to know whether that would be acceptable to me. I swallowed hard, grumbled and asked whether there was any other assignment. When Mary and I had been in Kathmandu, we took a vacation one year to go Hong Kong. We decided to fly on Pakistani

International Airways through Dacca which was still in Pakistan at the time. This was one way to expand our knowledge of local geography. We spent a day in Dacca, doing the usual tourist things. I remember that Dacca at the time was not a prepossessing place. I remember vividly commenting to Mary as we wound up our tour of the city that this was one post that could be scratched from our wish list. Stoessel said that there was nothing else; so I agreed to go to Dacca.

That assignment was made when Secretary Rogers was in charge. He resigned before I left Warsaw. Henry Kissinger, who replaced Rogers, stopped all, or almost all, Ambassadorial assignments then in process. He wanted to review them. They called me and said that my assignment was up in the air for the moment, but they thought it would be eventually approved. They suggested that I stay in Warsaw a little longer. I stayed a while, but my replacement was due to arrive. Eventually John Davis, then my replacement and now the Ambassador to Poland, arrived which made it very awkward with two DCMs at one post. So they decided to bring me back to Washington—EUR—over-complement. So I left Warsaw, flew to London for a ten day vacation—Mary and I toured around for a while. One day, after our return to Dick Luther's house where we were staying—he had been in the Embassy in Warsaw—came another call from Stoessel saying that Kissinger had asked George Vest, who had been the US chief delegate to the European security conference (CSCE) in Geneva, to return to be his press spokesman. That meant that the Department needed some one to replace Vest. Stoessel asked that I fly to Geneva that afternoon and take over the delegation, since Vest had already left. So I flew to Geneva and became the head of the delegation for about five months.

At one point in January 1974 , I returned to Washington on consultation about the conference. I had heard nothing about Dacca since going to Geneva. I took advantage of my visit to inquire about the Ambassadorship to Bangladesh. It was suggested that I see Larry Eagleburger, who was Kissinger's right-hand man. So I went to see him and talked

to him about that assignment. He said he would look into it and, sure enough, shortly thereafter, I was back on track to Dacca. That is how I got to Bangladesh.

Q: What were our objectives in CSCE?

BOSTER: This conference had been in motion for a long time. I did not see myself as a conceiver of a new approach. We didn't really have our heart in this conference at that time. It was a secondary consideration for the U. S. We considered other matters more important than CSCE. The other countries wanted to have the conference and we were just going along with it to keep them happy.

Q: George Vest would certainly agree. He felt that Kissinger, when NSC advisor, was much more interested in disarmament and felt that CSCE was getting in the way.

BOSTER: I think that is a fair description of the situation. For example, every one of the 33 nations attending was represented by an Ambassador. The US delegation was headed by people who did not have Ambassadorial rank which was a deliberate way of indicating that this was not a major interest. My energies during the short time I was there was devoted to mastering the intricacies of the CSCE process, and keeping track of the issues of concern to us, reporting to Washington and playing a very low key role as desired by Washington.

Q: When you arrived in Dacca in April, 1974, what was the situation?

BOSTER: Very bad. The fundamental problem in Bangladesh is one of over-population supported by less than impressive resources. They had bad floods, starvation, famine. The US mission in Bangladesh was to a large extent reflected in the AID Mission. As I remember, there were more people in the AID Mission than in the rest of the Embassy. That is the way it should have been. We had a very large PL 480 program that supplied tremendous amounts of grain to the Bangladesh government. Our foreign policy interest was essentially humanitarian.

Q: There was an earlier period when while the separation between Bangladesh and Pakistan was occurring that we were tilting toward Pakistan. Was there any resentment from the people over this while you were there?

BOSTER: There were occasional references to that. Everybody had the story. But it didn't affect the bilateral relationship which was really quite good. They of course were very dependent on us. Kissinger came to visit Delhi and Islamabad—he apparently decided that he could not visit Pakistan and India and not go to Bangladesh. He was exactly right. He had a very successful visit. He and Sheikh Mujib got along beautifully. It was a one day visit, but he made a very moving speech at the Sheikh's dinner. So in terms of atmosphere and morale building, it was very successful.

Q: How did you feel about Sheikh Mujib?

BOSTER: He was a very charismatic figure, a wonderful man. You like this man instantly just by looking at him. You couldn't help being impressed. You go to see him and you would notice people from villages from all parts of Bangladesh waiting to see him and, I understood, getting to see him. That is the way things operated in that society. The same thing applied to his house. It was a very modest home, large by Dacca standards, but still certainly not a house for a President of a country. The general consensus in the diplomatic community and among Presidential advisors that here was a “father figure”, a man who had a beloved place in Bangladesh history. He was the George Washington of the country who led them to independence, but did not have the managerial talent to administer the affairs of State. Some one with more managerial talent was required. They had that talent in Zia who eventually succeeded him. Mujib was a political success and a managerial failure.

Q: While you were in Bangladesh, a number of coups occurred. Mujib was killed. What happened?

BOSTER: It was a terrible tragedy. Army people came in to his house, which was not too far away from our house. Some of the women were reportedly killed by swords. Many people were killed, including Sheikh Mujib. They wiped out the family. It was brutal. The speculation was that the people who staged the coup wanted to remove any possibility of that family being able to reassert any claim to power.

Q: What did the Embassy do during a coup?

BOSTER: As soon as we heard the rumor, we sent an immediate cable to Washington, sketchy as our information may have been. I got a call from the DCM after my wife and I were awakened by gun-fire. He said that a coup had taken place and that I should come to the Embassy. We then looked at the question of recognition of the new group. We did continue relations with the new government and began to deal with them. It was very difficult dealing with the new crowd. They were not a very experienced group. They didn't last very long.

Q: Did we have any major interests that would have made us interested in the continuing governmental instability?

BOSTER: No, we didn't. We didn't approve of what had happened—that was terrible. But it had happened and we had to carry on with whoever was running the country.

Q: How did you deal with the Indian representatives who undoubtedly had a special relationship with Bangladesh?

BOSTER: We had very friendly relations with the Indian Ambassador and his people. As time went on during my stay, the tension between the Indians and the Bengalis grew. The Indians had played a special role in helping Bangladesh achieve independence. One might have thought therefore that the relationship would have been extremely friendly for a long

time. In fact that did not happen. They had border disputes which were pretty lively and not easily solved. The relations between the two governments became almost tense.

Q: Were we able to remain distant from this tension?

BOSTER: The Bangladesh government would complain to us about unfriendly Indian behavior. But we were not playing any mediating role.

Q: You went to Guatemala as Ambassador in 1976 and stayed till 1979. How did this assignment come about?

BOSTER: I got this assignment because after the third coup, I was getting pretty frazzled out there. I was tired. So when I returned to Washington I spoke to Carol Laise, who was then Director General. I told her I would welcome another assignment. She said she would keep her eyes open. That resulted in a telegram in due course saying that the Department intended to propose me to Montevideo. That looked alright to me and I agreed to the proposal. Then came a second message saying that Montevideo was not available, but that the Department wanted me to go to Guatemala to take Frank Meloy's place, who had just been named as Ambassador to Lebanon, where he was murdered by terrorists within ten days of arrival. So I went to Guatemala.

Q: What were US interests in Guatemala during the 1976-78 period?

BOSTER: Some of our main interests were in the country's economic development. Our AID program was of course much more modest than it had been in Dacca. We were interested in the development of credit facilities and agricultural production. In general, we were trying to foster increasing cooperation between the two countries. Toward the end of my stay, and even more so after I left, the Nicaraguan problem began to loom in importance. These discussion were primarily undertaken by Bill Bowdler, our Assistant Secretary of State, who visited and consulted with the government. During my time, the

main interest was in maintaining good relations. We were interested in a good aid program and stable relations.

Q: It is often claimed that American business interests drive our policy toward Latin America. Did you have any pressure of that kind?

BOSTER: It was not the case in Guatemala. I don't remember any specific issues which were raised in response to American business interests. There were US businesses in Guatemala, but they were going along fine.

Q: How was the Guatemalan government while you were there?

BOSTER: My principal contacts were with President Laugerud who was in office for the major part of my assignment. I would see him with some frequency. He was extremely cordial. Spoke excellent English and a wonderful person to deal with. The Foreign Minister was one of the ablest people I have ever known. It was an ideal situation—a congenial, intelligent President and a congenial, highly intelligent Foreign Minister. One problem we had to resolve during my tour there dealt with the draft of the US government's report on human rights, as mandated by Congress. They were very upset about us preparing a report on another country's human rights record. They felt this was an intrusion in their internal affairs, that no one had a right to such intrusion, except maybe the United Nations, and certainly that no single country had that right. As far as the Guatemalans were concerned, we could keep our aid if it was conditioned on passage of a human rights test. Brazil took that same line with us later. Frankly, in my own mind, I thought the Guatemalans may have had a reasonable position.

Q: Did you report this reaction back to Washington?

BOSTER: I reported the Guatemalan reaction but not my own view. I remember that some people in the Foreign Service, including me, felt in the beginning that this was some kind of unnecessary complication of our relationships with other governments, that

human rights in foreign lands may not have been our business, and that in any case, our pursuit of it was to the detriment of our relationships with other countries. They would have been happier to shove the whole issue under the rug and felt that if the human rights proponents, particularly in the State Department, could be kept under control, matters would be far better.

Of course, since 1976, US interests in human rights around the world have strengthened and have become a basic part of our approach to foreign policy. In some relationships—with Romania, for example—it is key. I was wrong to think of it as mere meddling. In fact, the US support for human rights has worked and we no longer think it is anything strange.

Q: What role did you think CIA was playing in Guatemala. Were you comfortable with it?

BOSTER: Yes.

Q: Were you at all concerned with what was going on in Nicaragua?

BOSTER: This problem began to loom as I was leaving. In the period that followed me, this problem became extremely important. But I was not involve very much at all, except perhaps in my last few days at post.

Q: How about the internal situation in Guatemala?

BOSTER: It had been pretty bad before I came. It was never very good, even while I was there. People were being killed, but compared to what it had been earlier—people told me of seeing bodies floating down rivers each morning. Laugerud came in as a healer, to some degree. He was much more moderate than his predecessor, according to the conventional wisdom in Guatemala. Things were quieter. It was not absolutely normal, but an improvement over the recent past. There was a right vs. left syndrome with the EGP, a far left terrorist organization, creating the major problems. It was not a major threat to the government, however.

Q: I get the feeling that our relationships with Guatemala were not very important in the 1976-78 period. Am I wrong?

BOSTER: I certainly don't want to leave that impression. We were watching closely what was happening to the left and whether it would represent a threat. But since the situation was better than it had been, relatively speaking.

Q: Did the US Ambassadors in Central America at the time communicate and exchange views?

BOSTER: Our dialogue was principally with Washington. There were annual Chiefs of Mission conferences for all US Ambassadors to Latin America, not just Central.

Q: Did Mexico loom as the big colossus to the North?

BOSTER: Not in Guatemala, no.

Q: How about Belize?

BOSTER: Belize did represent a problem. This was an issue between the British and the Guatemalans because Guatemala felt that Belize was their territory. There was some tension between the UK and Guatemala. The Guatemalans were not talking to the British so that to some degree we served as a transmission belt. It helped each side understand where the other stood. We did try to ease Guatemala's concern and urged caution and prudence. We tried to do what we could to dampen things down.

Q: Did you retire from Guatemala?

BOSTER: Yes.

Q: At the end of the interviews, we usually ask two questions: What gave you the greatest satisfaction?

BOSTER: I don't know that there is any element that I can single out. I would not have missed the whole composite of experience in the Foreign Service for anything. I think I am just the luckiest guy in the world to have stumbled into the Foreign Service. The experience of living abroad in many different societies and learning new languages and meeting interesting people and feeling to be a part of history, is all wonderful.

Q: Could you give us a brief background which led you to have an interest in foreign affairs?

BOSTER: I had graduated from a small College in Ohio with a major in English Literature and a minor in History. I had worked my way through college by working for a newspaper. My newspaper experience was probably more relevant to the work I did in the Foreign Service than any other single feature of my background. That made a difference for me because to a large extent, what you are doing abroad particularly at the beginning of your career you are sending your despatch to an editor who sends it to the Department. There is analysis in addition, but you have to be able to organize the facts quickly and with some clarity.

Q: Where were you born?

BOSTER: I was born in a little village in south-eastern Ohio called Rio Grande. My parents were in school work. I did all my schooling in another little village in north-east Ohio called Beloit. World War II was the turning point with me as it was for so many others. It picked me up from a small town and changed my life completely. It was an opening to a new life.

Q: My last question: if some young person came to you and asked whether he or she should join the Foreign Service, what is your reply?

BOSTER: It depends on the person's interests. It is not for everybody, especially in some of our posts where good theater, good music and good food are absent. If you are

interested in other cultures and foreign policy, then I can't imagine a more satisfying career for anybody.

End of interview